

Chapter 6 New York City

Mr. Masterson's office at United Carbide's headquarters looked out over East Fiftieth Street, but it seemed peaceful. Perhaps it was the deep pile carpeting, the sound absorbent ceiling, the white sound of the ventilation, or the Navajo carpets hanging on the walls. I found the environment both reassuring and disconcerting. Disconcerting, because for nearly three years I had become inured to the noisy clatter of life aboard a steel warship. Reassuring, because the hush seemed to represent a keen interest in what was to happen.

Mr. Masterson leaned forward and spoke in a hushed voice, as if he were conveying confidential information. He had a round, florid face, with deep-set eyes, and lips which pursed and un-pursed, involuntarily. He mentioned the many business in which United Carbide was engaged: industrial gases, plastics, chemicals, metals, and electronics. "Our diversity represents a great opportunity for someone who is embarking on a life-long career in business."

"Yes, sir, I'm sure it does, but how does one know where to start?" I was wearing a new, grey herringbone suit which I had bought two weeks before; in fact, I was wearing a new white button down shirt, a rep striped silk tie and new wing-tip black shoes. There was even a grey felt fedora perched on my lap. I was taking no chances of not looking the part of the promising young executive, which, I had decided, was to be my new identity.

Mr. Masterson leaned back in his chair, and considered me with a look of satisfaction. "We make the choice of where to start our graduate employees easy for both the company and the employee. With rare exceptions, we start our new graduate employees in our corporate finance department. From that vantage point, the employee has a perspective of several United Carbide operations, and his financial skills – which will be essential as his career progresses – will be sharpened. During the three months of his assignment in corporate finance, we can also make an assessment of where his temperament and particular skills will best fit within United Carbide."

"So, at the end of three months, the employee is reassigned to an operating unit?"

"No, the process is much more flexible than that. The employee participates in projects with various operating units, and in this way, he becomes familiar with several units. Each new employee also has several advisers here in the headquarters. There will be an adviser from each of the major functions: sales, manufacturing, technology and finance. Discussions with the advisers, and exposure to the operating units, help the new employee narrow his choices until a mutual decision is made."

(I was tempted to ask what happened if there was no 'mutual decision', but I quickly realised that in such a case, there would be probably be a parting of ways.)

Mr. Masterson went on to review my transcript from Notre Dame in which he noted my tendency to get straight A's in finance and accounting subjects. We talked about the Navy, training, discipline, long hours, loyalty, hard work, and advancement. He nodded frequently and made notes.

A week later, I was asked to meet with Mr. Walsh, the Manager of Financial Controls. He was a very clever man who seemed to take nothing in life seriously, except the business numbers. Whenever his young secretary was in earshot, he would make slightly off-colour remarks, to which she would frown and roll her eyes. But when he handed me an income statement and then a balance sheet to review and comment on, his questions came like sword thrusts: sharp and quick. "What is the gross income? . . . net income? . . . where is the good will? . . . where are the cost overruns? . . . what would you do about them?" . . . etc. . . . etc. I think Mr. Walsh was startled that I knew (or thought I knew) most of the answers.

My second meeting with Mr. Masterson took place three days later. "I'm pleased to tell you," he said, "that we would like to make you an offer." He paused for a moment to gauge my reaction. (Stifled elation.) "Your starting salary will be seven hundred and ten dollars a month. You'll report to Mr. Walsh as a junior financial controller. He has in mind several projects for you involving various chemicals divisions, and we feel you may be best suited to work within the finance function." *Thank you, Lord! Thank you! Thank you!*

Later, I had time to reflect on my tentative assignment to the finance function. First of all, I didn't like the idea of being in sales. My idea of the typical salesman was of a glib extrovert who had to convince reluctant, unfriendly buyers to buy his products (which were probably second-rate). I didn't feel I had the background to be a successful technologist in United Carbide; I would have had to major in chemistry or engineering. And manufacturing conjured up images of me dressed in stained, greasy coveralls trying to find a critical leak in a maze of piping. *OK. So finance it is.*

When I was released by the Navy and was looking for a job, I lived at home in the small Bronxville house with my parents. It was convenient: New York City was a 35 minute train ride; and it cost me next to nothing. But, it also had its disadvantages. There was my room which still had its model airplanes hanging from the ceiling. The metal bedstead and the beige carpet were still the same. But I was different. I was no longer the bright, reserved schoolboy, eager to learn about the world. I was a man who had known women and death, and who was shortly to climb the ladder of the business world. In short, I didn't feel I belonged there.

My parents were also a matter of concern. My father was older, greyer, and never smiled. His routine had not changed in the eight years I had lived elsewhere. He caught the 7:56 to New York, returned on the 6:07, had a couple of (additional) drinks with my mother, had dinner, watched television and went to bed. Where was the joy in it? Certainly not in his office work, that was unchanged in fifteen years. I asked him if he had thought about changing jobs "just to do something a little more interesting." He shook his head emphatically. "No, Henry, in another twelve years, I'll be able to collect my pension. If I leave now, my pension will be peanuts."

I thought, *maybe he could open a small shop in Bronxville, or learn to be a ventriloquist, or decide to be a professional darts player.* But I realised that he would feel an insufferable loss of value if his identity as a business man working in a large company were to change. He was a prisoner of his own identity.

My mother seemed to have nothing interesting to do. The house was clean and tidy; breakfast and dinner were good and on time. But since Jenny had left to go to university and on to New York City, and I was gone, what was there to occupy her? She spoke frequently to my father about their weekend plans: they would play tennis with this couple, go to the Norman's house for dinner, play bridge with . . . There were five seemingly vacant days in between weekends. *What does she do?* She mentioned the books she was reading: mostly quality history and biography, and I remembered that she had a degree in literature from Sarah Lawrence College. "Mom," I asked, "don't you get a little bored reading eight hours a day?" "No, Henry, why would I get bored? I like reading and I'm learning a lot." "But, Mom, you're a people person, and you're cooped up in the house all day." She took offence at this. "I'm not cooped up all day, Henry! I go shopping and I go see a friend or two."

I knew that my mother hated to go shopping – particularly for clothes, and I suspected that most of her friends were busy during the week. "Mom, I just meant that it would be good if you could do something that you enjoyed and where you're with people – maybe two or three days a week."

"You mean being a substitute teacher?" she shot back.

I knew that my mother would become exasperated with a room full of high-spirited kids. "No. I meant doing some kind of charity work where you make a real contribution in a people environment."

She regarded me sceptically. "You mean sorting through peoples' rejected clothes in a charity shop?"

"Not necessarily." I thought for a moment. "How about the library, Mom?"

"What about the library?"

"Well, maybe you could be a volunteer library assistant. You love books and you like to work with people."

There was a lengthy pause during which I felt she was considering. "I don't think the library takes volunteers, besides I'm not a qualified librarian."

"It doesn't hurt to ask."

"I'll think about it."

My mother's identity had been incomplete: she felt that she was more than a housewife, an amateur scholar and a social friend. Her husband was no longer an executive. But she didn't know what she could be.

Surprisingly, three weeks after our conversation, she was working from 1 until 6 three days a week as a library assistant in the Bronxville Public Library. She was unpaid but pleased.

I asked her what she did.

"Mostly, I help the high school kids with their research projects." This was said with uncharacteristic enthusiasm.

"You mean like chemistry projects?"

My intended humour evaded her completely. "No! Of course not! I help with English and history projects, and I know enough French to help there, too."

* * *

After I started working at United Carbide, I rented an apartment on East Twenty-First Street, just west of Gramercy Park. There were two things I liked about that

apartment: it was within an easy walk of the Lexington Avenue Line at Twenty-Third Street, and it was relatively inexpensive. I could leave my apartment, be on the subway within ten minutes, ride for ten minutes, get off at the Fifty-First Street station and walk to the office: less than half an hour, door-to-door. It did have some disadvantages, including the fact that it was a fourth floor walk-up, but I thought, *I can use the exercise*. It had no view, other than the back of the building behind it. Yet that, too, had its advantages. I remember that there was one lady who lived in the building behind – at about the same level as my apartment – who frequently failed to draw her curtains. Either she was oblivious, or an exhibitionist; I couldn't figure out which. Anyway, every morning she would do exercises in front of her window – absolutely stark naked – even in the winter. I suppose that the purpose of her exertions was weight loss. Certainly for someone of about forty, she was a bit chubby, and I actually admired the contortions she put herself through.

What I particularly liked about those days in New York was the freedom I had. I was out of the military, I was making decent money with modest expenses, and I could do pretty much what I wanted outside of working hours. At work, too, Mr. Walsh was a good boss who coached me when I needed it but otherwise let me get on with the job.

After I took up residence in New York City, I occasionally went out to Bronxville to see my mother and father on weekends. It was kind of strange, I thought, that my father never suggested that I have a drink with him after work in Manhattan. After all, I had followed him to Notre Dame; I had been in the Navy like him; and now I was working in business as he was. But I have to admit it was not like him to be flexible. I suppose he was something of an introvert, like me, and we had seldom really connected. He wanted to take the six-o-seven to Tuckahoe every night, sit with the 'other' execs, have a couple of drinks and play some poker. (I often wondered whether he was ever a consistent winner at poker. I doubted it. Why would the 'real' execs want to play with him if all he did was take their money?)

Jenny had gone to Rhode Island School of Design in Providence. As her graduation from Bronxville High had approached, she was determined to go on to a good design school, but, my father was opposed. "Your mother doesn't have a business-oriented degree, and I can't afford it," he argued.

"Dad, the world is changing," I can still remember Jenny insisting. "Women can no longer afford the luxury of being without saleable skills. I will get a scholarship, and you can pay the rest." She did and he did.

When I was a junior at Notre Dame, I remember taking the train up to Providence to check up on her when our Easter holidays under lapped. I was startled. Jenny was living like a hippy. It was not just the floor-length batik skirts and the Cossack blouses, or the shoulder-length ear rings. It was her whole life-style. She was living in an apartment on Orange Street with seven or eight other students, men and women. Actually, it was the top floor of a warehouse, which had, more or less, been converted into an open-plan dormitory, with assorted beds, chests, chairs and tables. What I found most shocking was the bathroom facility. There was one bathroom, with two stall showers, several sinks, and two toilet stalls. I said, "Jenny, this doesn't give you much privacy!"

She shrugged, “No.”

“Don’t you find it embarrassing to be naked in the shower with men around?”

“Not particularly. They’ve seen it all before.”

“But doesn’t this kind of promote . . .” I paused to search for an acceptable word.

“Promiscuity?” she asked, one eyebrow raised.

“Well, yes.”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Look, Henry,” she said, earnestly, “There are three guys and five women here. The women set the rules: no fraternization. If one of the guys tried any funny business, he can either move out or have his balls cut off.”

I could not suppress a chuckle at the blunt language I had never heard before from my little sister. “Oh, I see,” I said, “That should take care of the problem.”

As far as I know (and older brothers rarely know about these things), Jenny remained a virgin until sometime after she went to work in New York. There was a guy named Robert, who was probably Jenny’s first lover. They were a couple, but not living together, for about a year.

I met Jenny for drinks after I, too, had settled in New York. “How’s Robert?” I asked.

“That bastard! He’s gone!”

“What happened?”

Jenny took a long pull at her Scotch and soda to compose herself. “He called me one day at work, and told me he wasn’t feeling well. Said that he didn’t feel up to seeing me that evening.”

I nodded.

“So, I thought,” she continued, “that I’d play Florence Nightingale, and provide him with a little tender loving care. On the way over to his place after work, I picked up a bouquet of daffodils. I let myself into his apartment - I had a key, and I called out, ‘hi, Robert, I’m here!’” Jenny took another sip of her Scotch. “I heard a muffled cry from the bedroom, and I thought *he must be sicker than I thought!* So I rushed to the bedroom, and there he was, in bed, stark naked, trying to cover himself and especially the big-titted bimbo – also naked – who was with him.”

“Oh my gosh!” I said, “What did you do?”

Jenny glared past me, her lips compressed. “I lost it! I threw the daffodils at him. They went all over the place. Then I grabbed some shoes and started hurling them at them. When I ran out of shoes, I took a pillow, and I started beating the two of them with it. I was shouting, and they were terrified, shielding their heads. The pillow burst and feathers went all over the place.” Jenny paused, looked down at the table, and then she started to smile. “Strange,” she mused, “I was so angry and humiliated at the time. . . . Now, as I recall how I tried to beat the two of them to death with that burst pillow, I can almost laugh.”

After that, Jenny seemed to go off men for a while. She had a good job as a graphic designer at Jamieson Associates, one of our dad’s competitors. I think she saw herself as a liberated, artistic woman with a good job and lots of female friends, living in an apartment with a good address on the Upper East Side. As ever, I was proud of her.

Most of my relationships with women were social rather than romantic. I suppose there were several reasons for this. In the first place, building a romantic relationship was pretty expensive: dinners, theatre (or at least movies), presents, etc. Also, I sensed that Jenny's friends were looking for husbands, and I wasn't ready for that yet, though they seemed to assume that I was ready, and they welcomed me to their social get-togethers.

My sex life wasn't exactly non-existent, but it was pretty limited. I excluded any girl I might conceivably want to marry: that was just asking for trouble. However, I was willing – from time to time – to do what I called 'a little fishing'. This was a role reversal from what had happened when I met Luli, where she did the fishing and I was the (happy) fish. 'A Little Fishing' involved going down to Washington Square, by myself, on a Friday or Saturday evening, and finding a seat in one of the local bars. I found that it was best to 'dress up' a little: not so much that you'd look out of place, but certainly, no old sneakers, jeans, or T-shirts. I wanted to look like a man of substance. So, I would sit at the bar (drinking very little) and watch the girls go by. In those days I was, I suppose, a pretty good looking guy.

I believe most women consider those aggressive introductory, chat-up lines, like, 'haven't I met you somewhere before?' a complete turn off. If a girl gives you a glance more than once, I think she'd at least like to know something more. So, for example, if a group of three girls came into the bar, were standing nearby, and if one of them (who happened to glance in my direction a couple of times) looked particularly interesting, I would smile and just say 'hi'. If I sensed a little interest on her part, I would try an innocuous subject for discussion: "This bar is rather crowded tonight, but I think it's a pretty good place." And it goes on from there: "I'm having a gin and tonic. Can I get you something?"

And: "Oh, I work for United Carbide in their finance group. How about you?"

And: "I like your earrings a lot. They're very becoming."

And: "No, I'm single. How about you?"

And: "Are you ready for another drink?"

And: "You know, I really like the colour of your lipstick."

And (after two more drinks and her friends have left): "Can I walk you home?"

I had several rules:

1. Never make up tales, exaggerate or lie. (These will come back to bite you.)
2. Pick out two or three personal things and compliment them sincerely, once you get to know her: her hair, her smile, her hands are all possible candidates. (A girl likes to be appreciated.)
3. Don't talk about your feelings. (These will be misunderstood.)
4. If she is good in bed, for goodness sake tell her so! (This can lead to repeat performances.)

I never really counted, but I would guess I was successful about half the time. You may well wonder why I didn't get hooked (along with the fish). Actually, in the year before I met Suzanne, I only went fishing about seven times and caught about four, of which one was a repeat catch. They were generally looking for commitment, so they would get exasperated and throw me overboard when I repeatedly wriggled out of their nets. Gabby was right: "Once you start fooling around with women, they expect your undivided attention."

In those days, I was a pretty faithful church-goer. It wasn't so much that I was 'religious'. Of course, I believed in God, and I thought that Jesus was real, but I didn't go to church to just to worship. I went to church because I thought it was the right thing to do, and I thought I ought to try to expand my social life. Jenny admonished me: "Henry, for goodness sake! You've got to stop being such a hermit! Get out and meet some nice, attractive people!"

I don't think I was actually such a hermit. In fact, my work involved quite a lot of contact with people. But most evenings, after I got home, I'd read the paper, make myself dinner and read a book if there was nothing of interest on TV. Still, I recognised that my somewhat solitary habits didn't exactly fit with my self image of being an 'interesting, well-rounded individual'.

I went to Saint Francis Xavier on West Sixteenth Street which was a twelve minute walk from my apartment: quite convenient. It is a large church with an interesting history. It was founded in 1847 by a Jesuit priest who bought a disused Protestant church with a down payment of five thousand dollars. The church burnt down shortly after its purchase, but the parishioners built a new church in 1850. The new church was outgrown and the current large, Baroque-style church was built in 1878. It has many beautiful decorative features, many of which need restoration. But I find it restful and serene.

At that time, Sable Shadow and The Presence would come around from time to time, but I didn't seem to have major moral issues requiring their attention. There were a couple of instances I recall. One was when I'd been on the new job for just over a year: whether I should ask for a raise in salary vs. waiting to be informed by my boss. Sable Shadow seemed to suggest that I should '*be aggressive*' while his opposite counselled '*patience*'. While I was still considering it, Mr. Walsh called me in and gave me a raise of a hundred and fifty dollars a month, which was more than I would have asked for. This experience left me feeling kindly disposed to both my boss and to The Presence.

There was also the issue of the beggar whose chosen spot seemed to be on the corner of Twenty-First Street and Park Avenue: directly on my route to work. This fellow was a grey-headed black man with a weathered face, and missing one leg. He sat on a three-legged stool, which he must have brought with him, and he played familiar hymns on a miniature accordion, his open hat on the pavement in front of him. Regardless of the weather, he always seemed to wear the same clothes: a shabby, navy blue quilted jacket, a stained pair of brown, heavy cotton trousers, and an oversized pair of sneakers without socks or laces. What was most unnerving about the man were his sad, rheumy eyes, which sought to make contact with every passer by.

I saw him every morning; his eyes seemed to look directly into my uncertain soul: I had given him nothing.

One night I lay thinking about the man: *Where does he live? What happened to his leg? Does he make enough to live on?* I worried that I had given him nothing. The dark shadow crept over me: *Be easy, Henry! Just cross Park at Twenty-Second Street.*" I fell asleep.

In the morning, I made my usual cup of coffee, and was sitting with my back to the windows through which the sunshine was streaming. I felt at peace with myself and the world. An unexpected thought flashed through my mind: **A dime a day is nothing to you. He will love you.** This thought startled me: I suppose I had more or less decided to cross at Twenty-Second Street.

I dropped a dime into the man's hat. "Thank you, sir. May the Lord bless you," he said, and smiled at me. I was astonished: I'd never seen him smile at anyone.

The dime-a-day became a habit. I learned that his name was Leon, that he was from Chattanooga, and that he had lost his leg in France in 1944. He called me 'Henry'. Something else happened that surprised me: when I gave Leon a coin, other people gave him coins, and I began to notice that he was calling other people by their first names.

I thanked The Presence for his advice.

One rainy Sunday, I went to mass at Saint Francis Xavier. I was feeling rather lazy and not looking forward to a walk home in the rain. The priest, Father Donovan, reminded the congregation during his announcements at the end of mass, ". . . and you are all invited to coffee in the Parish Hall." I thought, *why not? It would certainly beat walking home in the rain.*

Since I always came to mass alone, and had never been to the coffee hour before, I knew no one in the congregation. Of course, I recognised some faces, but I didn't know anyone's name, or anything about them. So, I was standing by the edge of the crowd, sipping my coffee, and surveying the scene. I became aware that there was someone next to me. "Do you come here often?" she asked. I turned to see who it was: an attractive woman of about my age, also looking over the congregation. "Yes," I said, "I usually come to this mass, but I've never had coffee here. Perhaps I'm just a bit anti-social," I added, sheepishly. She turned to look at me; her face wore an amused smile, and was framed by masses of tight, brown curls. Her large eyes were deep brown, with prominent lashes, and her cheeks and nose were sprinkled with freckles. "I don't believe you're really anti-social," she said, "I'll bet you didn't expect to have anything in common with the people here." There was something intriguing about her mouth: the shape of her lips changed as she spoke, adding a further dimension of feeling to her words. "I suppose that's it," I conceded, "Most of the people here are older, and I guess many of them have lived in the neighbourhood for years." "But you haven't lived here for very long?" she prompted. "For just over a year." "Well, that would give you time to get to know your neighbours."

Take the initiative!

I asked, "Are you one of my neighbours?"

She smiled. "Probably so. I live on East Twenty-Third Street."

I found myself warming to this woman's humorous assertiveness. "Yes," I said, "I think that qualifies you as a neighbour. I live on East Twenty-First Street. I'm Henry Lawson."

"And I'm Suzanne Barton. Glad to meet you, Henry." She turned to face the crowd.

"So, do you know anyone here?"

“Not a soul, Suzanne. Do you know anyone?”

“Yes. There are quite a few people I know. That couple over there – she’s wearing a brown suit – are Doris and Norman Whitman. They’re talking to Betty and Joel Carpinski, and . . . Do you want me to introduce you?”

“No thanks.”

“Why not?”

“I’d rather talk to you.”

There was that amused smile, again. “What about, Henry?”

“Well,” I fumbled for an answer, “I guess we could talk about . . . neighbours.”

“OK. Tell me about some of your neighbours.”

I immediately dismissed my rear window neighbour lady as a candidate for discussion. I didn’t know her name, and, besides, she didn’t seem appropriate.

“Well,” I said, searching in desperation for a name, “There’s Leon. He’s black, a bit of a musician – plays the accordion – and he was injured during the war.”

“He sounds interesting. Where does he live, Henry?”

“He’s from Chattanooga,” I replied evasively.

“How did you get to know him?”

“Oh, I ran into him on my street, near Park Avenue.”

Suzanne studied me; she was trying to recall something, then there was a flash of enlightenment. “Is he the one who sits on the stool at the corner of Twenty-First Street and plays the accordion?”

“Yes,” I said, braced for derision.

“I didn’t know his name is Leon,” she was very serious now, “and I didn’t know he is from Chattanooga, or that he lost his leg in the war. . . . How much do you give him?”

“Ten cents.”

“Ten cents a day?”

“Yes.”

“I sometimes give him a quarter.”

“He’s a really nice guy,” I said.

She was thinking intently. “Would you like to get to know him better?”

“Yeah, but . . .”

“But what?”

“Well, I can’t exactly have a conversation with him when he’s panhandling.”

“OK, but you could . . . You could . . . invite him for dinner.”

I stared at her. My mouth was probably hanging open.

“You could!” she repeated, assertively, this time.

“He wouldn’t come,” I said.

“I bet he would. In fact, I bet that if you invited me to the dinner, too, I’d accept!”

This girl was something else, and I didn’t know what to make of her. She didn’t seem like the Christian do-gooder type; she seemed more like a make-it-up-as-you-go-along free spirit. I was fascinated! “OK,” I said, “I’ll invite him, and you’re invited, too. What’s your phone number?”

She gave it to me.

Leon accepted my invitation to dinner the following Thursday. “Is it OK if I bring my wife? Her name is LeeAnn.”

“Yes, of course,” I said, then I added hastily, “It’s not going to be anything fancy, I’m just going to do spaghetti and meatballs.”

“That’s fine. We look forward to it.”

I called Suzanne and told her, but she didn't say "I told you so!" Instead, she said, "Can I bring anything?"
"No, I'm all set. Thanks."

She arrived at the stroke of seven, carrying a small bunch of yellow and red freesias. "I thought these might look nice on your table." She was as animated as I remembered, dressed in brown slacks and a yellow cardigan – no jewellery.

Leon and LeeAnn arrived moments later. She was wearing a dress and high heels. I mean, it was a J C Penny kind of dress: dark blue cotton with large yellow flowers, and topped off with a strand of large, glossy, black beads. She probably made a special effort to prepare for the 'party', and, initially, she seemed somewhat ill at ease. Leon was wearing a much newer version of his blue quilted jacket, a clean, white T-shirt, and a grey track suit bottom.

I made the introductions. Then, I said, "You didn't have to dress up, LeeAnn. I told Leon it was just going to be casual."

Before LeeAnn had a chance to respond, Suzanne put in: "She looks just fine, Henry. Women like to dress up when they go out." (This statement ignored the fact that Suzanne herself had not 'dressed up'.)

LeeAnn said, "Yaas, thas right! We do, don't we, honey!" I could see that LeeAnn had taken an immediate liking to Suzanne, in spite of the obvious differences between them. LeeAnn was quite a big woman – as tall as Leon, but with a bigger girth. Her black hair had maroon highlights and it was piled on top of her head. Her pudgy face, with its broad nose, was kindly.

I asked whether they would like some beer or wine to drink.

"Oh, I'll just have some water, thank you," was LeeAnn's reply.

Suzanne said, "Red wine?"

I turned toward Leon, who seemed to be having difficulty deciding. "I don't suppose," he began, "you have any Scotch whiskey?"

"Oh, now, Leon!" LeeAnn interrupted immediately, "You can't ask the man for his Scotch whiskey!"

Leon replied with mock contrition: "Well, honey, I thought it might go good with spaghetti and meatballs."

I could not restrain a laugh. "Yes," I said, "I think it would! Perhaps, I'll have some too."

The initial awkwardness between us disappeared at that moment. We moved to the kitchen where I had some cheese and crackers laid out and where I could put the pasta in the boiling water.

"Man, this sure is good!" Leon said, raising his glass to me.

LeeAnn frowned and turned to Suzanne, "How long have you folks been together?"

Suzanne laughed, "Well, we're not really together. We're just friends."

"Oh, I see," LeeAnn said. It was clear that she didn't.

"Let me tell you the whole story," I said. "I met Suzanne at church last weekend. We talked about people we knew, and it turned out that we both knew Leon. Suzanne said I ought to invite him for dinner. I said he wouldn't come. She said that he would come, and that if he did, she would come too, if I invited her. And here we are."

"Well, praise be!" LeeAnn marvelled, "Don't the Lord work in mysterious ways!"

Over dinner we talked about Leon's history. He had started out as a porter in the Chattanooga railroad station before the war. Times were tough. He moved to New York to work in Penn Station where shining shoes was financially better than being a porter. He met LeeAnne, who worked as a cashier in Woolworths. They got married, and had two kids: a boy and a girl. Leon joined the army, and became a casualty on Normandy beach; his knee was so shattered that the leg had to be amputated. His little girl was born brain-damaged with the umbilical cord wrapped around her neck. His son has sickle cell anaemia, and his frequent crises make it impossible for him to work. LeeAnn had become a full time carer. Leon found that, even with welfare, he could not support his family shining shoes. His current 'job' (neither Leon nor LeeAnn used the term 'begging', or anything similar – it was his job) allows them to make ends meet.

When they were getting ready to leave after dinner, LeeAnn said, "You folks gotta come an' have dinner with us sometime."

Suzanne said, "We will – on one condition: that you allow us to bring the ingredients." Leon nodded and winked. "You could bring along some of that Scotch, too."

Suzanne invited me over to her place for dinner the following weekend. Unlike my apartment, hers had some class: a view of the East River, nice furniture and thoughtful decoration. She was also quite a good cook, preparing a crab salad, tagliatelli with scampi, and an excellent tiramisu. (Her maternal grandmother had been an Italian immigrant.)

We talked and talked. I'm not usually much of a talker, but she has a way of provoking a discussion by making what seem like outrageous statements, which, on discussion, turn out not to be so shocking after all. For example, she said, "You know, Henry, I think they ought to legalise marijuana."

I was surprised. "Why do you think that Suzanne?"

"Well, that way it would be available in every drug store and supermarket for about a quarter of the price the dealers charge for it now."

"Yes, but then more people would buy it and become addicted."

"Maybe. Maybe not. Two things we can say. It would lose its cachet as and illicit drug, so maybe kids would be less attracted to it. And, nobody would be mugging anyone else to get the money to buy it illegally."

"So why hasn't it been legalised?"

"I think it's because of the stepping stone theory: that marijuana is a stepping stone to heroin and cocaine. I think that's nonsense. Is beer a stepping stone to gin?"

"Yes, in may case it was!"

And it would go on like this.

Suzanne told me she was a psychologist, and, as such, I would have expected her to ask me a lot of probing questions to find out what kind of person I am. But she didn't. She kept up a light-hearted banter in which I couldn't help but participate. Probably, in this way she learned a quite a lot about my values and personality. She was obviously very bright and totally at ease with herself.

Suzanne lived alone, and there was no hint of a 'significant other'. I found her very attractive; certainly she had a good figure, and there was something which was occasionally provocative about the way she carried herself. She sure as hell wasn't gay! If I'd been on a fishing trip, I would have pounced that first evening in her

apartment, but something warned me **Be patient! Time is unimportant.** So, I relaxed, enjoying the coffee and our conversation. When I left, she gave my cheek a brief kiss with one arm around my shoulder. On my way down in the elevator, I thought, *I think she likes me!* The thought made me very happy.

Believe it or not, Suzanne and I dated for a full month in completely chaste mode. It wasn't that I didn't want her, because I certainly did. I sensed that she was very interested in me, but that something was holding her back. My intuition told me that it would be best to let her choose the moment when she was ready.

In the meantime, we saw a lot of each other. On weekends, we used to go to art exhibitions and local concerts. She had very eclectic tastes: on Saturday we might go to an exhibition of primitive African sculpture, and, on Sunday, to an exhibition of Degas paintings. Musically, we might take in a jazz concert one afternoon and a Brahms string quartet the following evening. Suzanne was always interested in the emotion that the artist was trying to evoke, and what that could mean in terms of the artist's message or values. It wasn't just art and music which interested her. After lunch or dinner at my place or hers, she would often launch a discussion about politics or sociology. For example, she would comment on an editorial in the *New York Times* on affirmative action, and she would say, "Where should we draw the line on affirmative action?" After half an hour's discussion, we reached a consensus on the issue, and I discovered that I had some specific opinions on the subject. We often found that we changed each other's mind, but as we got to know each other, we began to realise that our values were very similar: we wanted to see a fairer society, with an emphasis on individual freedom, with nobody having a free ride. We felt that even the handicapped (like Leon) should be expected to contribute to their livelihood.

One evening, she had prepared a dinner of baked haddock, with spinach and wild rice. We were sitting on her couch eating grapes and drinking coffee, when the conversation lagged. She was sitting rather close to me, and she suddenly asked, "Henry, have you had many women?"

I was startled. "No, not many."

She seemed to be considering this response. "How many is that?"

I thought for a minute. "Six."

"My goodness!"

"Is that too many or too few?" I asked.

She looked down at her coffee. "It's more than I expected."

"How many were you expecting?"

"About three." She was biting her lip.

"How about you?" I asked.

"Do you mean how many men have I had?"

"Yes."

She was looking at her coffee again. "How many do you think I've had?"

"I guess about three," I said.

She shook her head.

"More?" I asked.

She shook her head. "Two. No. One. When I was eighteen, there was kind of a disastrous attempt." She smiled self-conscientiously.

At first, I didn't know what to say; then, "Tell me, about the one, Suzanne."

She looked at me briefly; her lips trembled slightly. She picked up her coffee cup and considered its contents carefully. "It was three years ago. . . . It wasn't good."

"Were you mistreated?"

"Sort of."

"What happened?"

"Oh, I thought he loved me. . . . But he became demanding and I . . . I guess I just turned off. . . . It started to be painful. . . . and . . . he accused me of being frigid." She looked at me, searching for understanding. "Henry, do you think, I'm attractive?"

"Yes, very."

She looked at me questioningly.

"Yes, Suzanne," I repeated, "I think you are very attractive." She leaned against me. I took her face in my hands and began kissing her. It was a long, long kiss.

"You take my breath away," she panted.

"That's good," I said, "I'll see you tomorrow at my place at about seven?"

"You can stay if you want, Henry."

"No, but I like you a lot, Suzanne. I like your cooking, I like talking with you, and I like your kisses."

I floated home. *This is a girl for me! She's bright – she makes me think. She has a sense of humour – not as serious as I am. She's good with people – not an introvert like me. And, I think she'd be a very good lover.*

The following night, I cooked lamb chops. They were nice and thick. I opened a bottle of Burgundy, and we talked about the events of the day while I made a salad, and dumped a bag of frozen fries into hot oil. They made a loud hissing sound and emitted clouds of steam. Suzanne was standing next to me, watching and sipping her wine. "Henry, you shouldn't be cooking those French Fries. They're probably full of cholesterol."

"No they're not. They're just potatoes and olive oil. No additives."

Suzanne admitted they were good, "but probably a little fattening."

We drank the last of our wine.

Suzanne got up from the table. "Are you going to take me to bed?"

She looked a little nervous.

"You'll have to seduce me," I said.

"Why?" she asked, surprised.

"Because I don't think you're one bit frigid."

Suzanne stood there for a moment, biting her cheek. Then she began to shed her clothing. When she was down to her underwear, she turned away from me, and took them off. Her bottom was lovely: rounded and smooth, and her waist was narrow.

She looked over her shoulder at me, still apprehensive.

"Very nice," I said.

Slowly, she turned around, one hand at her groin and the other arm across her breasts. Her face was flushed with embarrassment. I shook my head in wonder, but she misunderstood. "What?" she asked.

"You are really lovely!"

She dropped her hands to her sides and stood there, her lips trembling. "Oh, come on, Henry! Take your clothes off!"

I complied, and led her to the bedroom. I began kissing her as she lay on the bed: her face, her breasts, her belly. She had a beautiful body. Suzanne became impatient, reaching for my 'Other Henry'. "Come on, Henry!" she urged.

“Slowly, Suzanne! We’ve got all night.” I went back to kissing her mouth, her breasts, her belly, and then her nest of brown curls.

“No, Henry,” she protested, half-heartedly. I ignored her. Here I was, at last, at Suzanne’s secret treasure, and I was going to enjoy it. Slowly, she relaxed, and then her hips began to undulate – more and more rapidly. She was making little mewling sounds, which ended with a stifled cry of release.

I lay back down beside her; she was trying to get her breath. “Oh, God, Henry!” she whispered over and over. She reached again for my Other Henry, but I pushed her hand away. “Rest, Suzanne. Rest for a little while.”

I think she must have dozed off for a time. I lay looking at her untroubled face: the long lashes closed, her lips slightly parted, and the constellation of freckles on each slightly flushed cheek. I thought, *I can look at her enchanting face for hours!* Then, her large brown eyes were open and gazing at me.

“OK, Henry, I’m on the Pill,” she announced emphatically, “Now we’re going to do it!” She rolled onto her back, and looked over at me.

“No, Suzanne, you’re on top.”

“Why?”

“Because you’re not frigid,” I said.

Carefully and a little awkwardly, she positioned herself. “OK?” she asked.

“Yes,” I said, “Your feel wonderful, and you look gorgeous!”

She closed her eyes and began to move. Eventually, my crisis overtook me, and, as if we were wired together, she spasmed again with a cry of triumph.

She lay looking down at me, a complacent smile on her face.

“OK?” I asked.

“I love you, Henry.”

I kissed her. “I love you, Suzanne.”

After that, we just couldn’t get enough of each other. We didn’t move in together, but we might as well have. I kept some of my business clothes at Suzanne’s place, and she kept some of hers at my apartment. That way, we could always have dinner together, make love, sleep and have breakfast together. My world revolved around Suzanne, and hers around me. Anybody else was superfluous. While we were at work, we spoke to each other two or three times a day.

I was really in love for the first time in my life: I would have done absolutely anything for Suzanne. The miracle of it was that she felt the same about me. It didn’t seem possible that anyone could love me so much. This one, magical woman had wiped away all my self-doubts and my Angst.

Eventually, I realised that I wanted to show Suzanne off. In particular, I wanted Jenny to know how lucky I was. The three of us met for dinner at a little French bistro on Third Avenue. Jenny and Suzanne got along like long-lost sisters. Jenny called me the next day at work; “Where did you find that Suzanne? She is wonderful! And I think she’s just right for you. She’s bright, but she has a sense of humour, and I think she’ll keep you from agonizing over minutia.”

“I don’t agonize over minutia.”

“Yes, you do, and don’t let her get away.”

My father also liked Suzanne immediately. Watching the two of them talking, I suddenly realized that my father was a sucker for an attractive woman. And I began to wonder whether any other attractive women had wandered into his life. My mother was polite, but a little chilly. Maybe she resented my father's keen interest in this woman. I don't think she was fearful of an alienation of my affection (such as it was): she'd never taken an interest in my female friends. Before we left, she took me aside, and said something about not 'getting too close to a psychologist.' My mother had always been disparaging about psychiatrists, referring to them as 'shrinks'. In her mind, there was probably a strong linkage between psychiatry and brain washing.

Suzanne's younger sister, Lydia, was a pretty and lively creature. Perhaps a bit of an 'air head', as they say today. She had just taken a job as the PA to the president of a large shipping company, and within ten minutes, I was included in her circle of friends.

Suzanne's parents, the Bartons, lived in Somerville, New Jersey. Her father, Neil, was a 'project manager' with Sanofi Pharmaceuticals. From what he said, I think he was actually the marketing director responsible for the launch of a new drug. I guess pharma companies don't like to use the term 'marketing' as it implies too much 'push'. Anyway, I think I got into his good graces by showing a keen interest in what he did.

Suzanne's mother, Nancy, was sweet and kind and gentle to the point where I wondered how Neil put up with her. Everything was 'lovely' and everyone was 'adorable'. (I was immediately in the latter category.) I couldn't help but wonder how Nancy would have described the Holocaust. Maybe, in her world, it didn't happen.

I don't remember exactly how marriage came up, or who actually proposed. I think it was after we had been together about four months, the priest at Saint Francis Xavier made a general announcement about arrangements for getting married.

That includes you.

We looked at each other, and we squeezed each other's hands. That was it. I felt I should ask Suzanne's father for his permission. Suzanne, playing the devil's advocate, said, "What if he says 'no'?"

"I'll marry you anyway."

"So, why ask him?" She was almost giggling.

"Because it's the respectful thing to do, and I want to start out on the right foot with him."

"I know. I was just teasing. He'll say yes."

Two weeks later, Suzanne and I got officially engaged. We had gone to Somerville on a Sunday to have lunch with her parents. Neil must have been forewarned, because he interrupted my thoroughly planned and rehearsed speech with, "Of course you can marry Suzanne!" He clapped me on the back, and disappeared into the kitchen in search of champagne.

I called Grandpa Joe to tell him of my engagement. He said, "Have you got everything you need, Henry?"

"Yes, Grandpa, I think so."

"Has this young lady got an engagement ring?"

“No, Grandpa, we decided we’d look for an engagement ring later. We’d rather have a nice honeymoon.”

“It’s bad luck, you know, not having an engagement ring. I’ll give you a thousand dollars as a wedding present. You can spend it as you like, but when I come to the wedding, I want to see an engagement ring on that young lady’s hand!”

(Suzanne made a special effort during the reception to show Grandpa Joe the ring.)

The wedding date had been set for May sixteenth, and as the date approached, I started to have trouble sleeping. Almost every night, the black storm clouds would roll over me. I would be enveloped in uncertainty and fear, and I seemed to be falling, constantly falling into cold infinity. The voice of Sable Shadow was loud and insistent: *Do not marry this woman! She is bad luck! She will ruin your life!*

Seeds of doubt seemed to sprout within me. I thought, *maybe it would be better to postpone the wedding!*

Yes! Postpone! Cancel! Get out of the trap you are falling into.

I didn’t tell Suzanne about the terrible nightmares, but she was aware of my unspoken doubts. Patiently, she nursed me through those weeks with her unwavering love.

On Saturday, the sixteenth, I waited for the ceremony to begin in the sacristy of the church, sitting on a chair in my rented morning suit.

Run! Run! Run! the voice kept insisting. *It’s not too late!*

I stood up involuntarily, and moved toward the external door. At that moment, Beau, who had come up from Atlanta to be my best man, came striding briskly in. He stopped for a moment when he saw me. “Nervous, old buddy?” he asked, “It happens to the best of us! Let me tell you, I was a wreck when I was waiting to marry Nancy!” He put an arm around my shoulder and steered me toward the chancel door.

As we stood by the altar waiting for Suzanne to enter, Beau inclined his head toward me and kept up a whispered stream of encouragement. I have no memory of what he said.

I just remember that when I saw that white dress appear, far down the aisle, I was suddenly free from the dark captivity. As Suzanne got close enough that I could see her radiant smile, a joyful peace settled on me.

Mr. Barton had arranged for the reception to be at the Harbour View Club, which was on the top floor of the building at Two Broadway. He wasn’t a member there, but he knew somebody who was, and as the club did most of its business during the working week, they were glad to accept a Saturday evening booking. The panorama of the lower Hudson River as the clear, mid May afternoon turned to evening was breath-taking. There was the newly-completed Verrazano Bridge, with its deck over two hundred feet above the river, and its towers and graceful curves picked out in thousands of lights. A cruise ship, its upper decks ablaze with light was making its way up river. There was the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, where Suzanne’s grandmother had first entered the United States.

I was particularly glad to have Beau there. At the rehearsal dinner, the previous evening, he had told a story about going ashore to an officers’ club in the Philippines, where we had met two female, Navy ensigns. He said that I had suggested that we try to ‘entertain’ them, as they were both quite attractive. Beau explained that we had bought them drinks, played liar’s dice with them, and had ‘invested heavily’ in these

women. When closing time came, we were disappointed to see the two ensigns walk out, holding hands. (A true story, actually.) Beau concluded the toast by saying that he was very glad to meet Suzanne, and that she had restored his confidence in me as an excellent judge of women.

Gabby Williams was also present with his wife, Jolene, whom Gabby had met at his favourite restaurant in New Orleans, where she was a waitress. She looked like a miniature Lena Horne: barely five feet tall, and weighing no more than a hundred pounds, but when she walked into a room, you knew that Jolene had arrived! She wore a fluffy pink dress, gold high heels, and plenty of (probably real) gold bangles. She went around the room introducing herself: "Hi! I'm Jolene Williams. I'm from The Big Easy." Her brashness was offset by her syrupy drawl and ready smile. She was both self-effacing and utterly self-confident. It was impossible not to return her smile and fall into useless, but thoroughly enjoyable chatter.

"I wonder how they do it," Beau whispered to me and Nancy as he took in the huge oak, Gabby, and the little flower, Jolene.

"Well, Beau," Nancy began with a sweet smile at her husband, "I expect it's just like us." She paused for effect, "We women maintain the upper hand in most everything."

As Jolene and Gabby approached Grandpa Joe, I thought, *Oh dear! Here comes trouble!* And I made my way over to intervene. As I got within earshot I heard, "Oh! I'm so glad to meet you, Mr. Lawson! Without you, my Gabby wouldn't be in the Pro Bowl this year!"

It was the first time I had ever seen Grandpa Joe completely flummoxed. Here was this rather pretty, flashy black elf telling him with absolute certainty he had made a football hero out of her man!

"Well . . ." He cleared his throat, searching for words. "I'm very glad to hear it ma'am. . . . And . . . uh . . . what team will he be playing for?"

"Land sakes, Mr. Larson! Don't you know my Gabby is left defensive tackle for the Saints? So he'll be playing for the NFC!"

"Of course! How silly of me. . . . And . . . uh . . . where did your husband play his college ball?"

Oh dear! I thought, *he's paying so much attention to her, he hasn't really looked at Gabby.*

"Bless me, Mr. Lawson! My Gabby played at Notre Dame, of course!"

Grandpa Joe was still mystified. He glanced Gabby, then at Jolene, and he looked at Gabby again. "Ah, yes!" he exclaimed, "I remember! I met you at Notre Dame Henry's freshman year . . . and . . . uh . . ." He was apparently about to say something more and thought better of it. He looked back and forth between Gabby and Jolene. "I . . . for some silly reason can't remember how I helped your husband . . . was it some sort of scholarship?"

"No, Mr. Lawson! It was Henry!"

"Henry?" More confused than ever, Grandpa Joe turned toward me.

"Yes!" Jolene announced, "It was Henry who made sure that my Gabby kept his grades up and stayed in shape. Without Henry, my Gabby would have been kicked off the team and out of Notre Dame."

"Well, that's very good of Henry," Grandpa Joe said, a little sourly, still at a loss to see what it all had to do with him.

"Yes, of course it is!" Jolene insisted, "But we mustn't forget, Mr. Lawson, it was you who sent Henry to Notre Dame! Without you, Henry wouldn't have gone to Notre

Dame, and he wouldn't have been there to help my Gabby become a great football player. That's why I wanted to thank you so much!"

"Oh, I see," Grandpa Joe conceded, satisfied at last. "Well," he said, grabbing Gabby's hand, "You're to be congratulated! Good luck in the Pro Bowl!"

A few minutes later, Grandpa Joe took me aside. "Henry," he said, accusingly. "I thought that Gordon Rathbone – God rest his soul – was your roommate at Notre Dame."

"Well, Grandpa," I began, looking sheepishly from the middle distance to his face and back to the middle distance, "Gordon was my best friend. You remember that we spoke about my changing roommates at the beginning of freshman year?"

"I certainly do!" Grandpa Joe replied emphatically.

"Well, you see, Grandpa . . ." I paused for a moment to consider what to say. "The university wasn't keen for me to change roommates, and . . ."

"Why the hell not?" Grandpa was getting angry.

"Well, sir, they wanted me to be a kind of personal coach to Gabby."

"Now, you listen to me, Henry! I didn't send you to Notre Dame so you could help some big black bugger become highly paid professional football player!"

"No, sir, I know that. You sent me to Notre Dame so that I could get a good degree and a good job, and I've done that."

Grandpa Joe was still feeling thwarted. "Henry, if you had Gordon Rathbone for a roommate – like I had understood and I thought I had arranged – you wouldn't have had to spend a lot of time nurse-maiding that Gabby fellow; you would have had better grades, and you wouldn't have had to take the best job you could find on your own."

"Grandpa, I got the job I have because of the personal recommendation of Gordon's father to the chief executive of United Carbide."

"And how did that come about?" he wanted to know. So I told him.

"Well, I still think that if you had done what I had wanted, you would have gotten better grades," he commented peevishly.

"Maybe. But you know that going to university isn't just about grades, it's also about making friends, and in Gabby Williams, I have a friend for life."

Grandpa Joes studied me thoughtfully for a few moments; then he said, "In the future, Henry, if I ask you to do something, please discuss it with me, before you do something else."

"Yes, Grandpa, you're right. I should have, and I will in the future."

"And one more thing, Henry." Grandpa had taken hold of my arm to ensure that he had my attention. "I want you to behave yourself like a good husband with Suzanne. Don't you disappoint her, Henry, because you won't find another one like her."

* * *

Suzanne had obtained her undergraduate degree in psychology at NYU and her doctorate in clinical psychology at NYU Medical Center. She had done her residence at Bellevue Hospital, where she was working when I first met her. Bellevue was only five blocks walk from Suzanne's apartment on Twenty-Third Street, so her twelve minute 'commute' was even better than mine. But, she could be called out to examine a child in distress during the night or on weekends. At Bellevue, Suzanne was working for the New York City Department of Mental Health as a child psychologist. Her patients, aged five to eighteen, were from the bottom rungs of the

economic ladder, and suffered from depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, personality disorders, various forms of autism, and other neurological illnesses. Suzanne's role was two-fold: to make an initial diagnosis of incoming patients – a sort of triage – to evaluate the severity and type of illness presented; and, to treat a list of assigned patients in regular sessions. In both roles, she worked under the direction of Dr. Klingerman, a senior psychiatrist.

What was fascinating to me about Suzanne and her work was the dichotomy between her profession and her personality. I couldn't really understand how someone with an optimistic, almost whimsical outlook on life could enjoy working with seriously disturbed children whose long-term prospects in life were probably grim. When I asked her about this, she said, "Well, if I were a pessimist, who felt dismally sorry for the children I see, what effect would that kind of attitude have on the children?"

"Point taken, Suzanne, but don't you sometimes feel sad about the plight of these kids, or wish that sometimes you could work with a cheerful Downs Syndrome child?"

"Henry, in medicine, feeling sorry for a patient is not an option: it helps no one. They've been dealt an unlucky hand; they've got to play it. There's no going back for them, and lamentation just makes it more painful. So, my role as a psychologist is to help my ten year old patient who's been dealt a nine-high, garbage hand to turn it into a pair of nines. That way she's at least got some chance of winning a pot."

"OK. But the kids you're treating have not only been dealt an unlucky mental hand, they've got no chips to bet with, or much caring support."

"True. Again, they didn't get to choose who brought them to the table, or what resources they have to play with." She paused to think for a moment. "The frustrating part of my practice is that the mental health, economic and family problems that surround my patients tend to interact. So serious family problems will aggravate the economic circumstances and the child's mental health. But! And this is important to me, when I can make progress with a child in dealing with his neurological problems, his family environment tends to improve, and, as a result, the financial situation often gets better, too."

I gazed at her thoughtfully. "You know, Suzanne, those kids are so lucky to have you."

"Thank you, Henry. In a way, I'm very lucky to have them."

"In what way?"

"They remind me how lucky I am in terms of my health, my own economic situation, and in my relationship with Henry Lawson, and . . ."

I interrupted: "Suzanne, I . . ."

"No. Let me finish, Henry. And, it feels so splendid when one of my kids makes real progress."

My mind was submerged in speculation for a few moments. "Why do you suppose it is that everywhere in the world, people are born with a tremendous range of life expectancies from zero to over a hundred years? And this is in the context of other expectancies like economic – from pauper to billionaire and social – from outcast to celebrity."

"I don't know, Henry." She gave me her whimsical smile. "Are you proposing that life would be fairer if we were each born with a life expectancy of seventy years, ten friends and fifth thousand in the bank?"

"Something like that."

“That would be terminally boring, Henry. Besides, there would be little incentive to do good or evil. How would God know who the good guys were? . . . And what would the devil have to play with?”

We decided to consolidate into Suzanne’s apartment, which was closer to the Lexington Line station, was larger, and had a better view than my place. ‘Better view’ in the sense of an East River panorama, but, of course, it lacked the dubious perspective of a chubby, middle-aged lady doing nude exercises at seven in the morning. However, that missing feature was over-ridden by the naked proximity of my new wife. Most mornings, Suzanne would do her morning chores *au naturel*; she, like Jenny, had given up any inhibitions about her body. So, I would sit on the sofa, while she ironed a blouse or shirt, and I’d pretend to read the newspaper. She said, “Henry, haven’t you seen a naked woman before? In fact, didn’t you see this naked woman last night?”

“Well, yes, but . . . “

“But what?”

“I really enjoy looking at you, Suzanne.”

“I’m glad!” She stood the iron on its heel, pushed aside the newspaper, and sat in my lap. I kissed her and carried her to the bedroom.

Suzanne often mentioned Dr. Klingerman, and I would tell her about James Walsh. Curiosity about each other’s bosses got to the point where we agreed to invite each of them, individually with their wives, to dinner. The Klingermans were the first to accept. “Dr. K. is a very learned man, with essentially no sense of humour,” Suzanne told me. “He is patient and kind, but also rather cool and distant, yet I sometimes feel that he is able to read my mind. . . . Actually, I think that his apparent detachment allows him to completely focus on the other person, without any internal mental distractions going on. I believe he’s not naturally intuitive about people; rather, he’s a very keen observer and listener who’s constantly constructing his interpretation of the other person.”

“He sounds a little spooky,” I said.

“Yes, I suppose you could say that. I’ve found that he becomes more distant when he senses that he’s being interpreted or evaluated. Perversely, while he has no natural sense of comedy, he tends to be a little warmer when he senses that the other person is making a joke. Either, as a child, he was socialised to respond positively to humour, or it’s a kind of invasion which causes him to lose his detachment.”

“Oh, dear! Is this the kind of talk you shrinks engage in all day?”

Suzanne giggled. “What’s wrong with it?”

“Nothing, I suppose. . . . What have you tell the good doctor about me?”

“I’ve told him that you’re a very bright and thoughtful person, who engages other people extremely well, one-on-one, but who doesn’t enjoy large parties. I told him that you’re very good looking, with a very nice Other Henry.”

“You told him all that?”

“No, I lied about the Other Henry.”

“What? You said it wasn’t very nice?”

Suzanne’s giggles became paroxysms of mirth; finally, she said, “No, silly! I lied to you when I said I mentioned your Other Henry to Dr. K.”

When she looked at me with that joy-in-life smile, with the corners of her eyes crinkled in glee, it was impossible not to join in her fun. “So you were just pulling my . . . (I paused) . . . leg.”

She put her tongue in her cheek. “Yes. Something near your leg.”

“OK, Suzanne, what else did you tell him?”

“I told him that you have a bit of *weltschmerz* – what your friend Sartre called ‘Angst’ – which is caused by your taking life seriously, but, at the same time, you can laugh with people, and you are a Catholic socialist who invites a beggar to his apartment for dinner.”

“Oh, dear! He’s going to want to put me on his couch so he can do a proper analysis of this existential, Catholic socialist.”

Dr. Klingerman was tall, thin and rather formal. He came to the apartment wearing a plain, dark charcoal, three-piece suit, with a gold watch chain, white shirt, and a dark blue bow tie. He had a dark complexion, a thin, prominent nose and coal black hair and eyes. I guessed him to be in his early sixties.

“Good evening, Doctor Lawson,” he said with a bow to Suzanne. (I had never heard anyone call Suzanne ‘Doctor Lawson’. She was a Doctor of Philosophy, not a Doctor of Medicine, as he was. Perhaps he just wanted to elevate her status above that of ‘hostess’.) He stepped aside and took a younger woman by the arm. “May I present my wife, Esther.”

Esther reminded me at first of my rear window lady: chubby, with an attractive face, about forty. But there the resemblance ended. She wore what appeared to be a rather uncomfortable two-piece suit of navy blue taffeta. Certainly, she was not an exhibitionist; in fact, she deferred to her husband and spoke only when spoken to. On those occasions when Esther did speak, she would pause, and glance momentary at Dr. K.

Taking note of what sounded like a German accent, I asked Dr. K. where he was from. “I was born in Warsaw, Poland,” he said, “The accent you are hearing is from Yiddish, which is my mother tongue.”

“What did you do, Dr. Klingerman? . . .” I paused to search for the right words.

“During the war?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“Before the Anschluss in nineteen thirty-seven, my first wife and I managed to get to Sweden, and I was able to continue my medical studies at Goteborg University.”

“So, when did you come to New York?”

His dark, rheumy eyes considered me. “Do you really want to hear about my migrations?”

“Yes, I do, if you don’t mind.”

“In nineteen forty-six we returned to Poland, but it was a terrible place then: there was no work, much of the country was destroyed and we had lost many family and friends. The next year we moved to Tel Aviv, and I established a practice at Tel Aviv Medical Center.” He paused to reflect. “Then, my first wife was killed by the Palestinian fedayeen during a riot in nineteen fifty-one. . . . I tried to carry on for a year in Tel Aviv, but it was no good. I returned to Warsaw, where I met Esther, who is a third or fourth cousin. She was nineteen at the time; very pretty. I married her. It was her idea that we should go to New York. Because I am a doctor, we were admitted.”

“Do you have any children, Dr. Klingerman?”

"I have no children, but as you probably know, I work with children every day." There was a tone of regret in what he said. I nodded. "Can you tell me a little of yourself, Mr. Lawson?"

I asked him to call me Henry; then I gave him a summary of my background. We were sitting on the sofa in the living room, while our wives were busy in the kitchen.

"I have never fought in a war," he said, "but I have seen the effects of it. Cities can be rebuilt, but people . . ." His voice trailed away. He sat patiently, looking at me. I, too, felt he was reading my mind.

". . . people take a lot longer." I finished the sentence for him. Then, I told him about Gordon's death, and how for a period of months it had a depressing effect on me and Beau.

Dr. K. laced his fingers behind his head and considered the far corner. "You know, Henry, an important belief in Judaism is that the dead will be raised to life. If one has such a belief, is it your view that the negative quality of death is diminished?"

I couldn't help but smile. I thought, *this man is not just a shrink, he's a philosopher!*

I said, "As you know Dr. Klingerman, there is a very similar belief in the Catholic faith. As I understand it, there are differences, though. In the Catholic faith, the dead are judged by God and are consigned to eternal life in heaven, hell or purgatory. In Judaism, the dead are raised at some future date at God's pleasure, and there is a belief that God rewards those who keep his commandments, and punishes those who don't. The timing of rewards and punishments is not specified."

Suzanne and Esther had entered the room, and had seated themselves to better listen to the conversation.

"And may I be quite impertinent and ask about your personal beliefs?"

"I believe that there probably is some form of life after death, but perhaps not for all people, and I believe that God rewards and punishes us. . . . For me, trying to define God's scheme of eternal life, rewards and punishments is a waste of intellectual effort. Clearly, in my mind, He doesn't want us to know, and the absurdities and chaos that we find in life are present with his permission. I also believe that there is an evil force – call it the devil."

"What do you see as the role of this devil?" Dr. Klingerman inquired.

"He, or she (this with a wink at Suzanne), hasn't enlightened me as to her role."

There was general laughter. "But, I think he is the primary source of the absurdities and chaos. And yet, paradoxically, perhaps, I think the devil can be helpful."

Dr. Klingerman was clearly surprised. "Helpful in what way?" he asked.

"I just feel that the devil takes a personal interest in each of us and, to persuade us that we should follow his lead, he does something good for us."

"Henry!" Suzanne protested, "You're ignoring his ultimate motives!"

I said, "No. Since we have free will, we don't have to follow through in the direction he is leading us."

Suzanne rose from her seat, frowning, but she decided to change the subject.

"Benjamin and Esther, I've made an asparagus soup, some roast lamb, and a blueberry pie, but I'm not a proper kosher cook, so I hope that's all right."

Esther said, "That's perfectly fine, Suzanne! I don't always follow the kosher rules in my kitchen: too much bother."

We followed Suzanne to the dining room table, and once we were seated, she steered the conversation around to the effectiveness of the New York City transit system. On this controversial topic, everyone had an opinion, as well as three or four suggestions for the mayor.

I told Suzanne that I would prepare the dinner when James and Doris Walsh came to dinner. She protested that it was her job. I pointed out that she should be unencumbered so as to be able to evaluate my boss. Continuing her dissent, she said, "But he's going to want to talk to you, and you need to be unencumbered."

"Suzanne, I know James will want to talk to you. You're a very attractive woman, and James loves attractive women."

Suzanne offered a smile of resignation. "Two questions."

"Which are?"

"First, what are your thoughts on the menu?"

"Well, I thought I'd do a risotto with scampi to start."

"Whose recipe: yours or mine?"

"Yours. Arborio rice is better." She gave me a thumbs up. "Followed by roast beef, roast potatoes and salad."

"What kind of salad?"

"The classic Suzanne Barton salad." Another thumbs up.

"And what for dessert?"

I tried to keep a straight face. "I was thinking of doing either a chocolate soufflé or Baked Alaska."

Suzanne winced visibly. "Oh no, Henry! Don't try a risky dessert like that for your boss. It'll probably . . ." Before she could finish, I kissed her mouth.

"Actually, Suzanne, I was thinking of a nice fruit salad with a heavy splash of Cointreau."

Obviously relieved, Suzanne stood looking at me for a moment. "You know," she said, "You usually go about things so seriously, that when you say something like 'chocolate soufflé or Baked Alaska', I believe you! But when you throw me off course in a nice way like that, you're fun, and I like it!"

I hugged her. "And the second question?" I prompted.

"What can you tell me about James and Doris?"

"About Doris, very little. He has a picture of her in his office. She's blonde rather pretty – like a cheerleader in her late thirties." I thought for a moment. "Oh, and here's something that'll amuse you. A couple of weeks ago, I was in James' office and I noticed that the picture of Doris had been turned so it faced the wall. I called his attention to it, thinking that the cleaning staff had turned it around. He said, 'She's in time out.' I didn't dare ask what she had done."

Suzanne smiled, closed her eyes, and shook her head. "And the giver of time outs?"

"I think he's a little bit crazy."

"We're all a little bit crazy, Henry."

"Yes, I know, but he's at the upper end of the bell curve. You'll be able to figure out where he is on the curve. I think he's not quite into the vanishing tail, but pretty near that point. To me, he seems obsessed with sex and numbers, and paradoxically, the numbers have to be completely by the rules, but it seems that in sex, anything goes."

James and Doris rang our bell just after seven on a Saturday night. He was wearing jeans, a double-breasted blue blazer, a pink shirt and a yellow silk cravat. His face had some obvious liabilities: sharp nose, receding hairline, and narrow lips; but it also had assets: animated grey-green eyes and prominent dark eyebrows. As expected, James was overflowing with positive, nervous energy, like a ten-year-old boy who's eaten three candy bars. He introduced Doris, who was very nicely turned out in a calf-length navy blue skirt, white cashmere twin set and (real?) pearls. My image of

the cheerleader disappeared, as it became apparent that she was his (rather bossy) wife, rather than his trophy.

James, who had never met Suzanne before, approached her with great enthusiasm, kissed her soundly on both cheeks and, once he had his drink, gave her his undivided attention. His drink, I knew, consisted of a large highball glass, filled with half a dozen ice cubes, flooded with good gin, and topped with two large olives. I handed it to him. "Good man," he announced, "You will certainly go to accountants' heaven!" He then followed Suzanne to the sofa in the living room.

I turned toward the kitchen to get the white wine that Doris had requested. She followed me, having no apparent interest in her husband's conversation. "Are you going to do the cooking?" she asked. When I replied in the affirmative, I had the impression that she was impressed. Doris stood rather close to me as I prepared the risotto. Her crimson mouth kept up an easy line of chatter, her sky blue eyes making frequent contact. There was something vaguely familiar about our encounter – as if I were on a Fishing Trip.

James judged the risotto to be 'very good'. His wife said, with a trace of acidity, "Men can cook, too, James. I saw him make this risotto."

James chose to ignore the oblique reference to his own cooking skills. Instead, he said airily, "Well, we knew that our Henry was a man of many talents. Not only can he get a balance sheet right, but he can cook a splendid meal, and choose a gorgeous wife!" I sensed that James reference to 'a gorgeous wife' was a coded comeback for the slight he had suffered about cooking skills.

Later that evening, as they rose to leave, Doris cascaded praise on the cuisine and James emphasized that "you'll have to come to our place for dinner very soon!"

When they had left, I asked Suzanne, "What did you think, sweetheart?"

"I think you did a wonderful job with the risotto: lots of flavour, perfectly cooked; the roast beef and the salad were delicious, and there was a slightly heavy hand with the Cointreau."

"Yeah," I conceded, "I should have added it in stages and tasted it."

"That's OK. I still love you." She sat down on the sofa. "Speaking of heavy hands, your boss certainly has one. I made him another one of those drinks, but I filled the glass only half way, thinking that he certainly wouldn't want it filled again. Well, I was wrong! He thanked me, took a sip, and filled the glass! Then, he had four glasses of wine with dinner!"

I shrugged; what was I supposed to do about my boss' drinking habits?

"However," Suzanne continued, "he certainly thinks the world of you. I mean he said that you have the right talent to go places at United Carbide." She adjusted her position on the sofa. "But . . . he made me slightly uncomfortable when he was talking about your potential. It was as if your advancement was dependent on me. He didn't say so, or actually imply it . . . maybe it was the body language."

"I'm not surprised. The sexually hyperactive boss meets the splendid creature his subordinate has married, and he thinks, 'how can I? . . .'"

Suzanne shook her head in silent disapproval. "How about Doris?"

"Well, it was sort of the same thing."

Suzanne was puzzled. "What do you mean?"

"Doris didn't say anything or imply anything, but she stood close to me and she licked her lips and gazed at me with those big blue eyes."

Suzanne leaned forward like an explorer who's made an important discovery. "Ah ha! Somebody's not meeting expectations in bed. I suspect it's your boss."
I shrugged. "Never mind. Let's you and I get naked and go to bed."
"In that order?"
"Yes. That's what the experts recommend."

* * *

Suzanne and I got together with Jenny – usually for a drink or two – every couple of weeks. As far as I could tell, there appeared to be no man in Jenny's life for a year or two after Robert, the cheater. She was concentrating on her career at Jamieson Associates, where she is still working. (Recently, she did the multi-media roll out of Universal Foods new frozen pizza, which I thought it was pretty catchy.) But in those days, for a woman to be made a partner, you had to be extremely good at your specialty and adored by clients. But also you didn't want to give the faintest hint of potential maternity leave. This gave women, a powerful incentive to keep their love affairs out of the view of the office.

About the time I met Suzanne, Jenny met John in a Charlie Brown's bar after work. Jenny was with some girl friends, one of whom was getting married. The bar was crowded and they were standing up. The way John tells it, he was standing, too, with his back to her, when someone bumped his arm, and he spilled his Scotch on the skirt of Jenny's grey silk suit. She got very annoyed, and called him a 'clumsy ox'. John apologised profusely, several times. He took out his wallet and offered to pay her cleaning bill there and then. She just stood there, looking at him, so he continued to apologise. Then, she laughed. He didn't know what to do, but he started to laugh, also.

"There was this girl laughing at me," he said, "and I was looking at her face, and suddenly I thought, *she's wonderful!* I had offered her twenty dollars to have her suit cleaned. She refused, and in desperation, I offered her a dozen oysters at the oyster bar, because more drinks or dinner seemed out of the question."

As luck would have it, Jenny is very fond of oysters, and that was the beginning of her love story with John. He hastens to add that she actually had a dozen and a half oysters that evening.

John, who is a couple years older than I, was on track to be made a partner at Lehman Brothers. While I think he was anxious to get married and have children, he was sympathetic to Jenny's need to keep the relationship under wraps until she was made a partner at Jamieson. Two years after they met, they became partners of their respective firms, and six months after that they were married in the Church of Saint Joseph in Bronxville.

At the time they got married, I didn't really know how religious Jenny was. I knew that my mother insisted that the four of us go to Saint Joseph's every Sunday, and we had fish every Friday. So, it seemed pretty logical to me that Jenny would 'come home' to get married, and John as a non-practising Protestant, of some sort, went along with it.

My father had long since given up his club membership, and, anyway, he could ill afford to pay for the grand wedding reception that John arranged at the Ritz-Carlton in White Plains. And yet my father, like John dressed in a morning suit, was standing

at position number two in the receiving line (after my mother). He was behaving for all the world like the generous host at the big splash. John, who was number four in the line – after Jenny - is a pretty clever guy. I think he must have arranged the reception line charade beforehand with my father. I like to think I would have made the same arrangement at my own wedding, if Mr. Barton's circumstances had been modest and mine had been flush. But in my case, the circumstances were the other way around, and Suzanne's father paid for the whole thing.